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11th grade

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Project Hope 2016 Submission: "the Boy with the Axe"

There was once a boy who lived in a house in the forest. One of the things he often did in his spare time was chop down trees in the forest with his axe. Why, you ask? Some say he liked to show off how strong he was to be able to take down such tall trees. Some say he did it because he loved the tremendous sound they made as they crashed to the ground. Some say he simply liked to do it for no reason. Either way, this is why we call him "the boy with the axe".

So one particular day, the boy set off to chop down trees. He came to the first tree and prepared to swing his axe. The tree, scared of being chopped down, asked for mercy. "Please," it said to the boy, "have mercy." The boy, having heard the tree's plea, just laughed. "Mercy is for the homeless." He replied. The tree then answered, "Then one day, when you are homeless and shivering in the cold, I will shelter you with my branches." The boy swung his axe at the tree, and it came tumbling down.

The boy moved onward and came to the next tree. As he prepared to swing his axe, the tree was scared and asked for mercy. "Please," it pleaded, "have mercy." The boy laughed once more at the request for mercy. "Mercy is for the starving." He answered. The tree then told him, "Then one day, when you are hungry and have nothing to eat, I will bear fruit and feed you." The boy once again ignored the tree's plea for mercy, and swung at it with his axe. The tree came down with a loud *crash*.

The boy continued traversing the forest and came across yet another tree. He lifted his axe and made ready for chopping. The tree, just as the ones before it, became frightened and asked the boy for mercy. "Please," it said, "have mercy." The boy heard the tree, and laughed once again. "Mercy is for the endangered." He laughed. The tree then responded, "Then one day, when you are lost in the wilderness and in danger of being attacked by wolves, I will let you hide among my branches." The boy, disregarding the final plea for mercy, swung at the tree with his axe. The tree snapped and fell to the ground instantly.

The boy stood up, stretched, and saw that his work was complete. He saw that it was getting dark out, and he decided to return home. When he came into his house, he went to bed and fell asleep.

That night, a terrible storm began to brew. The boy woke up to the sound of booming thunder outside the window. Flashes of lightning lit up the entire house. Heavy rain and hail pelted against the roof. The boy became scared and hid under his covers, hoping for the storm to go away. It did nothing of the sort.

As the winds grew stronger, his house soon got blown down, leaving the boy out in the storm and in the wilderness. As the rain poured down harder, the poor boy became cold and started to shiver. He wandered the forest as it continued to rain, and as the night went on, he became hungry. The rain did not stop. The boy was lost. As he shivered in the cold, he heard barking in the distance. The boy turned and looked to see the eyes of wolves peering at him from the darkness. He knew instantly that he was in danger.

Terrified, the boy took off into the forest. He thought he could hear the wolves chasing after him. He ran for his life until he came to a tree. It looked just like the three trees he'd

chopped down earlier during the day. The tree stood tall above him, its leaves rustling in the rain. The boy looked up at the tree, and asked it for mercy. "Please," he said to it, "have mercy." The tree continued to loom over him. "I forgive you," it said. "Come under my branches." The boy crawled under the tree's branches. As the wolves closed in, they could not find the boy, as he was hiding underneath the tree. They became discouraged and left.

The rain continued to fall, but the tree's branches kept the boy dry. He became warm and comfortable, and soon, he fell asleep.

As the sun rose the next morning, the clouds cleared and the forest glinted in the sunlight. The boy woke up to find ripe, delicious fruit hanging from the tree's branches. He picked the fruit and ate, and he was no longer hungry. The tree spoke to the boy as he ate. "Mercy is for everyone," it said, "even the merciless." The boy responded to the tree. "Then I will never again be merciless." He said.

From that day forward, the tree sheltered, fed, and protected the boy. And the boy never again chopped down another tree. In fact, he planted new seeds for the three trees he chopped. Now, we don't call him "the boy with the axe" anymore. We now like to call him "the boy with the trees".